

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ETRD, EMIN, TH, BM

SUBJECT: INQUIRY INTO "BURMESE" TIN EXPORTS

REF: BANGKOK 0960

1. CROSS BORDER TRADE IN TIN FLOWS FROM BURMA TO THAILAND RATHER THAN REVERSE, AS THAI ALLEGE. ACCORDING TO FIGURES RELEASED BY GUB IN LOCAL PRESS JANUARY 16, BURMA EXTRACTS ONLY ABOUT 700 LONG TONS OF TIN A YEAR (THAT IS, STATE PROCURES ONLY THAT AMOUNT) OF WHICH ABOUT 600 LONG TONS ARE EXPORTED, CHIEFLY TO DATUK KERAMAT SMELTING COMPANY, MALAYSIA. THIS INFORMATION PROBABLY ISSUED TO COUNTER REUTERS RELEASE DATED JANUARY 15 FROM BANGKOK REPORTING THAT RTG PRESS SPOKESMAN HAD SAID INTERNATIONAL TIN COUNCIL HAD INFORMED RTG THAT BURMA EXPORTED ABOUT 3,000 METRIC TONS IN RECENT NINE-MONTH PERIOD, AND THAT RTG WAS INCREASING VIGILANCE TO PREVENT TIN SMUGGLING FROM THAILAND TO BURMA, AS GUB PRODUCTION ADMITTEDLY ONLY 600 METRIC TONS/YEAR.

2. EMBASSY BEST GUESS IS THAT GUB ANNUAL OFFICIAL TIN EXPORTS RUN ABOUT 600 LONG TONS A YEAR AS GUB CLAIMS. CLAIMED TOTAL PRODUCTION OF 700 LONG TONS/YEAR ALSO SEEMS REASONABLE DESPITE FACT

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THAT OFFICIAL BURMESE STATISTICS UNRELIABLE AT BEST, AND

EMBASSY BELIEVES THESE FIGURES LOW, PROBABLY COUNTING ONLY TAVOY TIN PRODUCTION AND NOT INCLUDING PRODUCTION FROM ELSEWHERE IN COUNTRY OR MIXED TIN/TUNGSTEN AND TIN/TUNGSTEN/SHEELITE CONCENTRATES.

3. BURMESE TIN PRODUCTION HIGHER THAN OFFICIAL PROCUREMENTS DUE TO EXTENSIVE ILLEGAL PRODUCTION OF BLACKMARKET TIN. THIS PRODUCTION ENTIRELY PRIVATE (GUB NOT INVOLVED). TIN ORE IS MOVED FROM PRODUCING AREAS IN TENNASERIM ACROSS NEARBY THAI BORDER AND SOLD TO THAI ENTREPRENEURS OR ILLEGALLY TRANSPORTED BY COASTAL VESSEL TO PINANG AND SOLD THERE. VOLUME OF TRADE IS UNKNOWN; IN ANY CASE, BURMESE BLACKMARKET TIN ULTIMATELY EMERGES AS EITHER "MALAYSIAN" OR "THAI" TIN. AS EXCHANGE RATE FOR SMUGGLERS AT THAI/BURMA BORDER IS ABOUT 1 BHAT EQUALS .75 KYAT, THERE WOULD BE NO INCENTIVE FOR THAI PRODUCERS TO SMUGGLE TIN ORE INTO BURMA FOR SALE TO LEGAL BURMESE CHANNELS AT THE LOW GUB PROCUREMENT PRICES.

4. BURMA'S OFFICIAL TIN EXPORTS ARE INSIGNIFICANT IN COMPARISON WITH EXPORTS OF OTHER COUNTRIES AND UNLIKELY TO INFLUENCE INTERNATIONAL PRICES. GUB'S CHIEF CONCERN IS AFFAIR APPEARS TO BE RESENTMENT OF APPARENT RTG ATTEMPT TO PASS OF THAI EXCESS TIN DISPOSALS AS BURMESE. GUB APPEARS DETERMINED NOT TO TAKE BLAME, ALTHOUGH AS NON-ITC MEMBER, IT HAS LITTLE AT STAKE.
HOWARTH

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